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WEEKEND

AUGUST 9-11, 2008

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Alexander Cain/The Union-Recorder

Creative Arts Coordinator Katie Whipple assists Brad Williams in creating a jewelry necklace while Shannon Carter (left) creates her own unique style of jewelry and Pat Golden (right, with marker) creates her latest piece of artwork titled 'Numbers.'

Milledgeville's newest art gallery provides unique opportunities for those with disabilities

By ALEXANDER CAIN
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When Walter Norman picks up a paintbrush, it's as if he's suddenly teleported to a whole new world. Each movement of his hand, each careful stroke of a brush, brings another piece of a painting to life, as if it's a puzzle meant to be studied or a newborn baby meant to be carefully cuddled and coddled.

To look at the finished products from Norton's hand, one would almost think he had studied at an art school or examined the works of Michelangelo, Picasso or Rembrandt.

But for this 40-year-old, there's no studies involved — only the combined power of both mind and body that work together to overcome the disability Norton has lived with for many years.

Norton is a client of the Baldwin Service Center in Milledgeville, a nonprofit organization set up to provide individuals with developmental disabilities living in Baldwin County with "the opportunity to meet individualized goals through employment and personal and social services."

Loosely translated, the service center assists those who may not normally be able to find a place within the local community in finding other ways and words to contribute to the society that sometimes shuns them for appearance, behavior, mannerisms or even a simple speech impediment.

As part of the center's ongoing mission to make sure those it assists do not fall between the cracks of what can sometimes be a very judgmental society, in 2000 the center implemented a Creative Expressions program that partnered with the Music Therapy Department of Georgia College & State University, one of Milledgeville's most well-known institutions and one of the more financially influential organizations in Baldwin County.

Eventually, the program expanded to include participation from the Education, Work, and Activity Center at Central State Hospital, the GCSU biology department



Photos by Alexander Cain/The Union-Recorder

Top photo, Walter Norman, a client of the Baldwin Service Center, proudly displays a painting he created earlier this week at the Creative Expressions Studio & Gallery, 1045 N. Jefferson St. Above, Colorful images, community and Center client artwork enhance the atmosphere and cover the walls inside the Creative Expressions Studio & Gallery on North Jefferson Street. The notes on the wall are indicative of the strong Music Therapy program provided to Center clients.

"I really like paintings and I enjoy seeing my pieces up on the walls."

Walter Norman

Baldwin Service Center client

and Lockerly Arboretum.

A few weeks ago, the center worked with the City of Milledgeville and local organizations to hold a grand opening ceremony for the Creative Expressions Studio & Gallery, where many of the center's clients such as Norman create their artwork, place it for display, and even offer pieces of art for sale.

Though Norman declines to provide information on his disability, he's more than willing to admit how much

the Creative Expressions program — and the gallery only a few doors down from the center — have helped change his life.

"I think it's a good idea. I enjoy coming here every day to paint and do art projects. I really like paintings and I enjoy seeing my pieces up on the walls," Norman said.

He's not alone in his enthusiasm — every center client who has come through the doors has had at least one piece of artwork

on public display, according to Katie Whipple, creative arts coordinator with the center and Creative Expressions Studio & Gallery manager.

"We have a lot of clients in the service center, and a lot of them are interested in art and the creative arts," Whipple said. "We've also invited the community artists in, so we're not just showing our own artwork but also the artwork of others."

Artwork from individuals such as Cookie Noel, who assists with the Project Linus organization, an organization that creates and provides quilts and blankets to children in Central Georgia, at Oconee Regional Medical Center.

"We were very happy to be able to have her donate some of her work to put on display," Whipple said.

Noel is joined by teachers, pottery artists and writers — both the center clients and the community share space inside this tiny art gallery just a few miles from downtown Milledgeville.

A visit to the gallery Thursday found Pat Golden carefully filling a large sheet of paper with figures in different colors.

When asked what the drawing would be when finished, Golden stated it was called "Numbers" — not for any particular reason, but just because that's the name she came up with for that project.

"I really enjoy it here. When I'm not here creating art, I'm also working in the laundry area over at Central State Hospital," Golden said.

For people like Golden, the gallery provides an opportunity to open the mind and allow the creative side to be expressed where she and others may normally not be able to do so in regular society.

"One of the things we are trying to do here is show that people with disabilities can still give something back to the community," Whipple said.

She's not kidding — the gallery offers handcrafted candles from \$3 to \$5, hand-

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Gallery

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crafted ornaments for \$2 each, handmade jewelry and art pieces for as little as a few dollars to up to \$100 or more — and all of it created by center clients.

“Because we’re an extension of the service center, we are very visual and have a strong visual arts program and a music therapy program as well. We’re trying to find avenues here to both display and sell the clients’ works,” Whipple said.

For Dee Weimer, coming to the center and creating art or simply singing to guitar music provided by Whipple means more to her than words can express.

“I love coming here. I especially like to do the artwork, work with clay and create jewelry,” Weimer said.

Though the supplies are strong, the center still deals with what other organizations encounter as items are depleted, according to Whipple.

“Well, we purchase a lot of what we have, but

we also ask for donations from the community,” Whipple said. “Right now, I think the best thing the local community could do for us would be to come in and visit and just see what we have to offer. These folks have a lot to give back. We would also like to see as many of their items sold as possible. We do keep a small commission, but almost all of the money from sold items is given to the clients that create them.”

A brochure available through the Creative Expressions program states the program follows the principles of “persons with disabilities want to give back to their community,” “cognitive ability does not dictate creative poten-

tial,” “the arts provides avenues for self-determination and self-expression,” “college students and persons with disabilities can learn from each other” and “there is a need to increase public awareness of the talents of persons with developmental disabilities.”

The Creative Expressions Studio & Gallery is located at 1045 N. Jefferson St. in Milledgeville and is open Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

The gallery may be contacted by calling (478) 445-2270, by e-mail at CreativeExpressionsArt@gmail.com or by [visiting creativeexpressions.weebly.com](http://visitingcreativeexpressions.weebly.com).